

## SOUTHERN PUBLISHING

**W**HY publish books in the South? Why not leave this job to New York, Boston, and Philadelphia? In my nearly twenty years of publishing in Chapel Hill, I have had to discuss these questions many times.

To ask why the South should engage in book publishing is like asking why it should do its own thinking and learning. Any people that leaves the task of thinking about its farming, manufacturing, trade and commerce, health, housing, race, employment, labor relations—any people that leaves its thinking about such matters to minds elsewhere is doomed to subservience. Nor is this all. On the contrary, it is not even the beginning. The most important of all thinking is not that which deals with what the world calls “practical.” The minds and the peoples that have dominated in the past have been those with fruitful conceptions of man and the world. More than a thousand years of the best Western thought were little more than an elaboration of Aristotle. For more than three hundred years, learning has followed the paths marked out by Francis Bacon. These and their kind, more than any military men, have been the great conquerors of the world. Their conquests have been permanent and have grown with civilization. The only way to escape subservience in the modern world is to absorb and use them.

Will the South have any say in determining the pattern of modern ideas? Unless the people of this region find ways to do far more and better intellectual work than they have done in the last hundred years, the answer clearly and definitely is No. And writing and publishing are as necessary to this intellectual development as air, water, and food are to the life of man. In failing to provide adequate agencies and means of publication, the South has overlooked instruments necessary to the fruitful development of higher education. And education at the lower levels cannot be soundly and wisely conducted unless first the basic

problems of education have been understood; and these cannot be understood by minds that have advanced only a little further than the elementary levels. Just enough training has been provided to enable the most promising young men of the region to get started, to make themselves known, and to find elsewhere opportunities that ought to exist here. Of course the means and agencies of publication are not any more important than good instruction and library resources and well-equipped laboratories. To argue this would be like arguing that air is more important to life than water and food.

What must the South do to achieve full and equal partnership in the nation? The one thing most needed is the development of higher learning. It is absurd for the people of any southern state to say, as so often is now said, "We cannot spend any more money on educational institutions; we are already spending more than we can afford." When people say this, they generally mean that adequate thought has not been given to the spending of their money; otherwise it is not likely that more is being provided and spent than can be afforded. Money is not the limiting factor in the South. The limiting factors are lack of public interest and, among educators, a woeful ignorance of what education can be and ought to be, and a tendency to parrot the most recent ideas as if no real thinking and important experience have been gained on this subject before the present generation.

Scholarly publishing and higher learning in the South are interdependent. It is impossible to have one without having the other. Both belong to the intellectual life of man just as air, water, and food belong to the physical life of man.

This interdependence, obvious as it is, has not been recognized. Scholarly publishing until recent years has been given very little attention and support.

Every institution in the South doing graduate and research work ought to have available, in addition to the funds necessary for this work, at least ten to twenty thousand dollars a year

for the support of scholarly publishing. The administration of funds for publication should not be in the hands of directors of research, but should be handled separately; and usually funds should not be allocated except on the basis of competent outside advice. If the administration of funds is not handled with the greatest care, the establishment and maintenance of standards will be rendered impossible, and, instead of contributing to the advancement of learning, strong forces will be set in motion tending to degrade or destroy what already exists.

I do not think that every institution ought to have a press. That would be a serious and costly mistake. It is certain that the South is now trying to operate too many, that too much money is going into the maintenance of separate and inefficient organizations. Universities, unfortunately, have a tendency to imitate each other and do whatever is popular at the moment. If the South's educational leadership were of high quality, it would know better than to follow the fashions. It would understand that while publishing is important, it is not any more important than numerous other things which universities ought to be doing; and that for everyone to try to do publishing may create a situation in which no one can do it as it should be done. Universities that expect to make scholarly publishing pay for itself have something to learn, and the learning is likely to prove expensive.

In 1943, of the 235 publishers in the country issuing five or more titles, with a total production of 6,761, nine were in the South and issued 121 titles. The South with twenty-five per cent of the nation's population did slightly less than two tenths of one per cent of the nation's publishing. Most of this almost certainly was poor imitation of bad models produced elsewhere. The region buys more books than it publishes, but both its buying and reading habits are notoriously bad. Good book stores are few and far between and in lean times face impossible difficulties. The plain fact is that the routine use of the printed word is on a low level. The creative use is almost non-existent. THE SOUTHERN

REVIEW, published at Baton Rouge from 1935 to 1942, was probably the best literary magazine in the language in that period. In 1939 it had more subscribers in Tokyo than in the State of Alabama, and more in New York City than in all the Southern States combined.

How many presses the South should have fifty to a hundred years from now, ought to depend on how much talent the region has and how publishing can be organized most effectively and efficiently. It is impossible to estimate what the effects would be in the South within a few decades if it were known that anyone who produced a good manuscript would get thorough and competent attention for it; and that if it constituted a contribution to learning, it would be published regardless of whether it could be sold in sufficient quantities to make it pay for itself; that, if the work were of such quality as to merit publication, the author would not be expected to provide a subsidy or raise funds for this purpose. No such condition has ever existed in the South.

The road to learning here has not been open. To travel this road the best minds have to get out of the region and go where adequate salaries can be earned, where interest and facilities and support for research and publication can be found. It is only the very exceptional man in the South who is able to work for years on subjects on which he has no chance to make money; and it is precisely those things that individuals cannot make money on that enable communities and whole peoples to enrich themselves and posterity. The region is far behind in work of this kind. If adequate support were provided in the field of botany, for instance, it would take two or three generations of intensive effort to bring knowledge of southern flora to the point where that of New England now is.

If higher learning and all those things such as publishing that go along with it are properly organized and adequately supported in the South, other developments that usually take place among civilized people will come of themselves. If this region

ever overcomes the handicap of being the home of millions of ignorant and unskilled producers of raw materials, if the knowledge and techniques characteristic of a highly civilized society are ever developed in the economic life of the South, other cultural agencies will develop along with these. Book publishing in the South is one of them.

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